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# DID



Verna Roehler at the wheel of the *Perseverance* on New Year's Day 1981, shortly before she and her son drowned near Bird Rock off Santa Cruz Island. Three months later, her husband, Fred, was arrested and charged with their murders.



# DADDY DO IT?

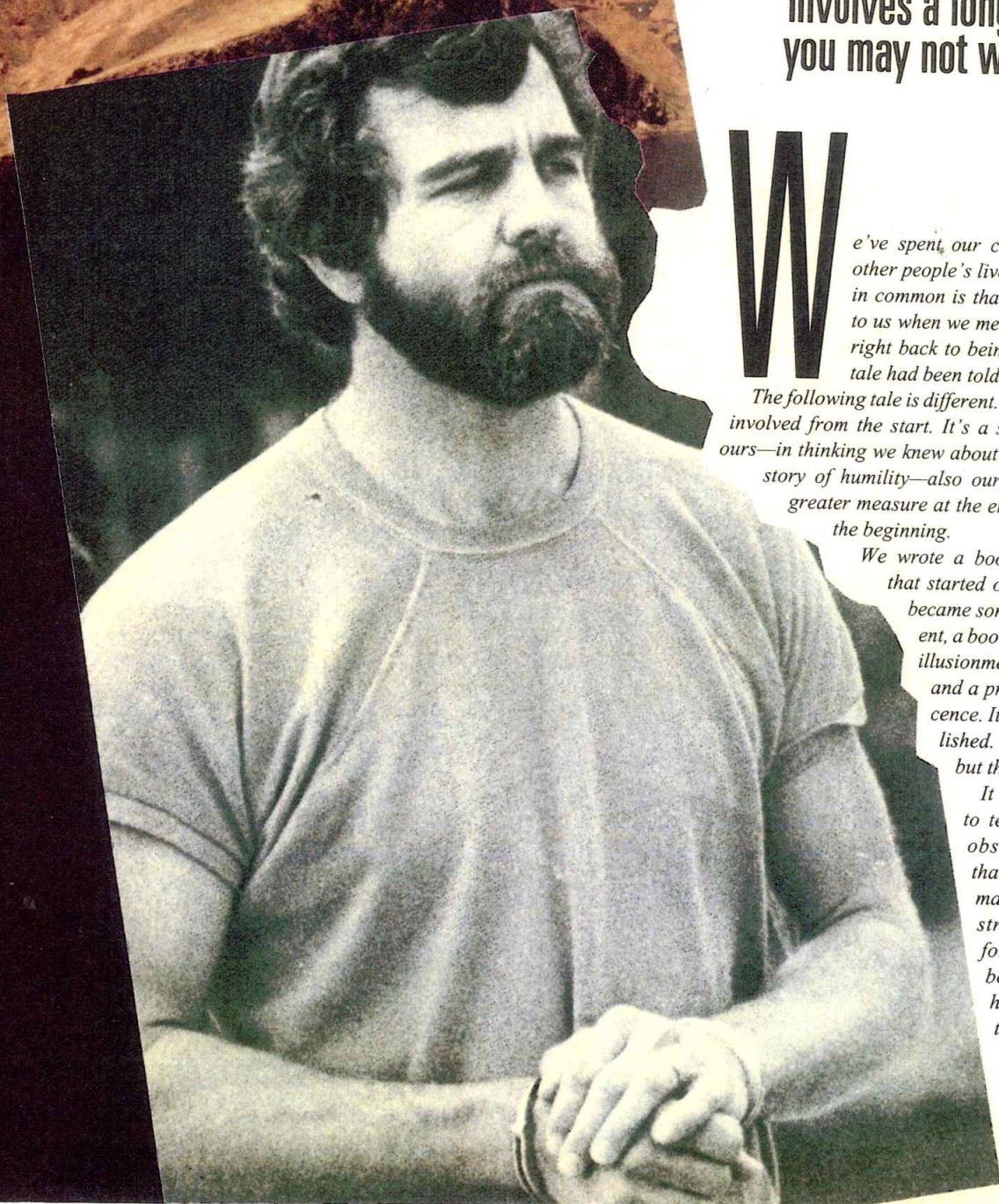
**Brady Bunch dad or killer father—when it involves a longtime friend, you may not want to know the answer**

**W**e've spent our careers writing about other people's lives. What they all have in common is that they were strangers to us when we met them, and they went right back to being strangers once the tale had been told.

The following tale is different. We were emotionally involved from the start. It's a story of arrogance—ours—in thinking we knew about human nature. It's a story of humility—also ours—which we had in greater measure at the end of the tale than at the beginning.

We wrote a book about it—a book that started out as one thing and became something vastly different, a book that brought us disillusionment, heartache, fear and a profound loss of innocence. It has never been published. This is not the book but the story it led us to.

It is not an easy story to tell. It has been our obsession for more than a decade. It has made us ill, has destroyed friendships forever. But it must be told, because we have inhabited it for too long.





The seas are cold in January around Santa Cruz Island—hostile, unpredictable. But from our perch in our Malibu home on a hill overlooking the Santa Barbara Channel, the scene the day after New Year's Day 1981 was a picture postcard—the sun shining, the sea sparkling. Nothing threatened, nothing chilled—nothing, that is, until we picked up the morning paper and read with horror that our friend and former Malibu neighbor Verna Roehler and her eight-year-old son, Douglas, had drowned in the channel the day before.

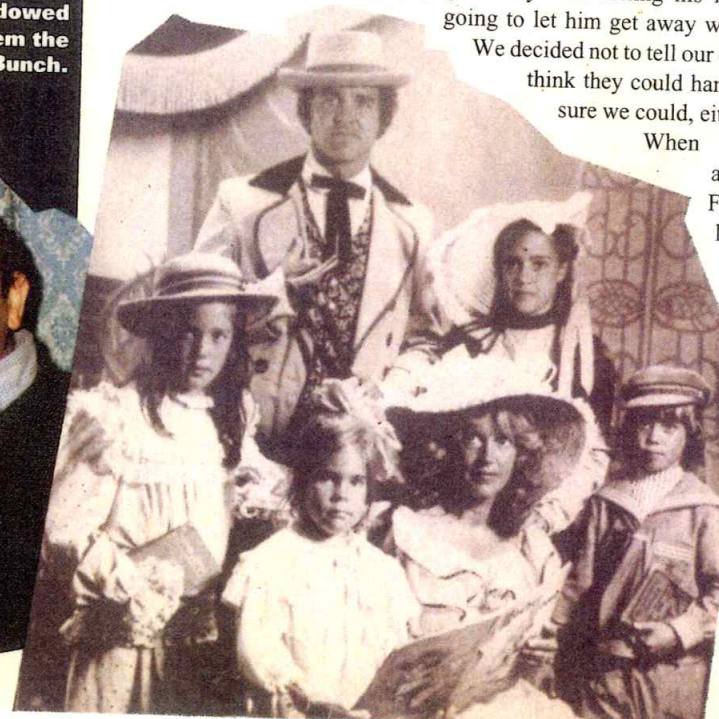
Details were sparse: a small boat overturned, mother and son dead, father and a beagle puppy the lone survivors.

We were very sad. We had liked Verna a lot. At 35, she was a sunny, athletic, all-American kind of woman. Douglas, who had been a friend of our son since nursery school, was a cheerful, blond-haired kid who loved the beach and the soccer field in about equal proportions.

How could it have happened? The Roehlers practically lived on the sea, and Doug had been wearing a life jacket. Doug's stepfather, Fred, was a deep-sea-diving consultant with the navy, as comfortable in the ocean as out of it. A big, powerful guy of 38, with a mass of curly dark hair and rather piercing blue eyes, he had a dry, sardonic wit that delighted those of us who found Malibu's "have-a-nice-day" blandness grating. There was a quiet wall of reserve around him that added to the impression of substance. This was not a man you could know everything about in 15 minutes.

He had been an exemplary father to his two small daughters in the years since his first wife's death in a freak accident in her backyard swimming pool. We would bump into him as he took them to school every morning, always staying with the youngest at nursery school as long as it took to make her comfortable. "Fred is a better mother than most of the real ones around here," his daughter Kirsten's teacher told us.

**Sally and Ivor Davis visit Roehler in Folsom Prison in 1985; Roehler and wife Verna at an outing to the county fair with their children, who had played matchmakers to their widowed parents. Friends called them the Brady Bunch.**



When Frederick George Roehler II married Verna Jo Johnson on the beach on Christmas Eve 1977, it had been a fairy-tale ending to two sad stories. Verna, whose former husband, Bill Johnson, had died two years before, used to babysit for Fred and his first wife, Jeanne, an attractive flight attendant. Jeanne had passed away just a year after Bill. Left motherless were Heidi, age seven, and Kirsten, three, who knew Verna's two children, Kimberly, eight, and Douglas, then five, from school and community sports. It didn't take the kids long to figure out that the families were tailor-made for each other, and they played matchmaker with a vengeance.

The wedding was a heartstring tugger and then some, with a grand piano, candles and buckets of poinsettias hauled out onto the sand from the Roehlers' new beachfront home. The couple exchanged rings with each other and with each of the children, who were dressed in red and white to match the flowers, because, as Verna explained, "This isn't just the marriage of two people, this is the marriage of two families."

We'd meet them jogging on the beach, camping up the coast or at community functions. Our kids went to their kids' birthday parties and theirs to ours. The Roehlers became an advertisement for family togetherness. We called them the Brady Bunch.

We watched the family prosper over the years. Between them, they now owned several homes, as well as a 48-foot yacht—the *Perseverance*. They planned, they said, to take the kids out of school for six months to sail around Mexico. The Brady Bunch was about to become the Swiss Family Robinson.

In March 1981, three months after Verna and Doug's death, we again picked up our morning paper and read with horror that Fred Roehler had been arrested for the murder of his wife and her child. The motive: \$700,000 worth of insurance on Verna, plus a \$60,000 policy on Doug, with a double-indemnity clause.

The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department had initially declared the deaths accidental, until they began receiving calls from neighbors in Malibu. One, from a friend of Verna, was chilling: "This guy got away with killing his first wife—are you going to let him get away with this one, too?"

We decided not to tell our children. We didn't think they could handle it. We weren't sure we could, either.

When we were finally allowed to visit Fred in jail, he looked awful. He was deeply depressed, yet he sounded amazingly reasonable and calm. He proceeded to tell us what had happened: His parents, one of his younger broth-



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ers and his sister-in-law had come out for Christmas from their home in Centerville, Indiana, and on New Year's Day, they had decided to sail the *Perseverance* to Santa Cruz Island. After anchoring at Little Scorpion Bay, Fred's parents went below deck for a nap with Kirsten while the other family members took a dinghy ashore to the island. Doug joined his mom, Fred and their new puppy, Lady, to row around the island in an old dory. The idea, Fred said, was to try out the new camera he had bought in preparation for the Mexico trip.

As he rowed the dory about a quarter of a mile toward a huge outcropping called Bird Rock, a flock of sea birds startled the pup, who tried to dive off after them. Doug lunged forward to save the dog, Fred scrambled to grab Doug and, in the sudden movement, the boat overturned, leaving Fred trapped by his camera strap under the boat. By the time he was able to free himself, the scene he encountered was a nightmare: Verna was lying with her arm across the overturned dory, Doug was floating face down in his life jacket, and both were already in a bad state. Grabbing one of them under each arm and with the dog on his head, he swam about 150 yards to the face of Bird Rock.

In his panicked state, Fred explained, he thought he could push them to safety up on the rock and then swim for help. But the cliff face was too sheer and slippery to climb onto, and he'd held them in the water for about 45 minutes, increasingly despairing of their ever getting help. He screamed to one passing boat, but no one heard him. Finally, another yacht did spot them and, with the greatest difficulty, pulled them aboard. But by that time, Verna and Doug were too far gone.

Fred was helicoptered by the coast guard to St. John's Regional Medical Center in Oxnard, where a priest told him his wife and stepson were dead. Two days later, fearing for the family pup, he begged a neighbor to retrieve Lady, the only one of the group to make it safely onto Bird Rock.

Not surprisingly, we and our neighbors could talk of little else. But not everyone, we discovered, felt as we did—that the arrest and charges were unjust. Malibu was split right down the middle: Friends and neighbors on opposite sides virtually stopped speaking to one another. One woman was thrown out of a local beauty salon, her locks still dripping, for bad-mouthing Fred.

The problem for many was Jeanne Roehler's death. For them, losing two wives to drowning was too much of a coincidence. But we knew that life played peculiar tricks, and Fred Roehler was not someone who stayed home and watched other people's adventures on television. If misfortune seemed to strike him more than most, he took more risks than most.

To us, the logic was faulty. Why would a man choose a holiday weekend in a well-sailed channel to commit two murders, when a month later he would be sailing off the deserted coast of Mexico in isolated, treacherous waters, where an "accident" could be arranged much more safely? And why would a man murder two wives by drowning, when he himself was an expert in the water—and not expect to be a suspect, espe-

cially since he had taken out the hefty insurance so recently?

For many, that insurance was all they needed to send Fred to the gas chamber. But he had explained to us that the package was part of a family trust he and Verna had entered into as the best way to protect their combined estates equally for all four children. He said the policies, under which he and the other three children had been insured, had been suggested by his family lawyer, Bill Fairfield, as a way of providing liquidity in an emergency. Tying up all of the financial ends meant the family could take off for Mexico free of worries. To us, it made sense.

**W**e sat through the eight-month trial—the longest and most expensive in Santa Barbara's history. Our minds were made up. In our jobs as journalists, we wrote about murder and mayhem all the time. But this kind of thing didn't happen to our friends. If it could happen to Fred Roehler, it could happen to any of us.

The prosecution had tried to introduce evidence pertaining to the death of Roehler's first wife and about previous insurance claims, but the judge ruled it inadmissible from the outset. "There goes their case," said his defense attorney, Jim Farley. "They might as well fold up their tents right now."

Indeed, the dogged Santa Barbara district attorney, Stanley Roden, was seeking a conviction purely on circumstantial evidence that, as it unfolded, we considered weak and pseudoscientific. An autopsy performed the morning after the incident clearly stated that the deaths were due to drowning, and there hadn't been a shred of evidence to support an arrest until, after the accusatory calls from Malibu, the bodies were taken from the mortuary and re-autopsied—just hours before they were to have been cremated.

Enter the mysterious éminence grise behind D.A. Roden's case: the infamous L.A. coroner Dr. Thomas Noguchi. Ensconced in a controversial battle to keep his job, Noguchi never appeared,

nor was his name ever mentioned during the entire trial. His evidence was presented only in documentation and under the auspices of others.

In reviewing the results of the second autopsy, Noguchi purported to have found a pattern of bruising on Doug Johnson's head. Those marks, he claimed, were consistent with Doug's head having been deliberately brought down with force on a particular part of the rowboat's gunnel.

But two distinguished pathologists testifying for the defense—one had been a consultant on the Kennedy assassination investigation, the other had written the textbook on forensic pathology—likened the pattern theory to a child's looking for shapes in the clouds. What kind of

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**Roehler at his wedding to first wife Jeanne, who later died in a freak accident in their backyard pool; when Roehler remarried on Christmas Eve 1977, as part of a storybook ceremony on the beach, he exchanged rings with his new eight-year-old stepson, Douglas.**

a charade purely for public consumption, but then, people do strange things. And it's a huge leap from there to murder.

**D**uring the trial, we had discussed with Fred the possibility of our writing a book about his story. He was in favor of the idea, though we made it clear it would be an objective telling in pursuit of the whole truth. But on the day the prosecution rested its case, Fred phoned us from jail. Forget it, he said. Since it was obvious the charges would be dismissed, he didn't want his family to have to relive the whole thing *again*. We agreed and began planning a homecoming party.

In early May 1982, the Roehler case went to the jury. For five days the sequestered jury deliberated. "Isn't it wonderful," Fred's elegantly dressed mother, Charlotte, said as she filed into the court to hear the verdict. "I'm going to have my son home again for Mother's Day."

We'd covered many trials. We thought we knew how to listen to evidence, how to read a witness and the tenor of the proceedings. So when the bailiff stood up and declared Fred guilty of the murder of Verna Jo Roehler; guilty of the murder of Douglas Johnson; and guilty of two special circumstances—murder for profit and the killing of more than one person—we were stunned. We felt sick and very, very cold.

He called us from jail that same evening. Go with the book, he said. He had nothing left to lose. "I have done no crime," he told us. "Nothing was shown in court."

He felt sympathy for the jury, he said. The penalty phase would put enormous strain on them. "Can you imagine it?" he asked. "Those poor souls."

In the penalty phase, Ivor was a character witness. He joined 63 others who, one after the other, trooped to the stand to testify that Fred Roehler was a giant among men, a loving husband and father.

All the stops were pulled out, including a much-debated appearance by Heidi and Kirsten Roehler and Kimberly Johnson, now under the guardianship of Fred's brother Ron. Shiny-eyed, with pink ribbons in their hair, they pleaded with the jurors to save their father's life. There wasn't a dry eye in the court—except in the jury box, where all 12 looked fit to kill.

But they didn't. At the end of 10 days the jury spared Fred's life—and sentenced him to life without possibility of parole. As Farley's cocounsel, Jim Westwick, said when the verdict was announced, "They couldn't kill the kids' father."

**B**y now we had signed a deal with Bantam Books for the story, and our investigation began in earnest. Its focus: Who was Fred Roehler? If we had had any doubts that the enterprise in which we were engaged was a worthy one, they were dispelled the day we opened a photo file that contained the grisly autopsy photographs of Doug. Those pictures have haunted our dreams for years. If the death of that energetic, laughing boy, the same age as our own son, had been something other than a tragic accident, we now had to know.

We began with an issue that had been gnawing at us since the beginning of the trial—that of first wife Jeanne's death. In the penalty phase, D.A. Roden had spent nine days trying to present "evidence in aggravation" excluded during the main trial—that Fred had also killed Jeanne. But again, he had much of his case pulled out from under him by the judge.

ridiculous stuff was this to send a man to the gas chamber?

The D.A. painted a very different picture of the Fred Roehler we knew. Here, he said, was a desperate man, overextended financially and faking ailments to collect disability payments, yet committing himself to vast insurance premiums simply because he was certain of one thing: With murder in his heart, he wouldn't be making the payments for much longer.

We, on the other hand, were impressed by the fierce loyalty of those who, if he *had* been guilty, would have had the most reason to want revenge. Verna's mother and Jeanne's father, both with daughters now dead, were standing by him to the end. If that didn't speak volumes for the man, what else could?

Only one revelation came as a surprise to us. That wonderful beach wedding had been something of a sham. The marriage had never been registered, in order to protect Verna's \$200-a-month pension from her former husband's company. The Roehlers, in fact, had not married legally until July, just five months before their fatal sailing trip. It did seem odd that they would mount such



The most Roden had been able to show was that the L.A. County sheriffs who investigated the case were wrong in believing that Jeanne had had enough alcohol in her system the night she died to be declared legally drunk. In fact, the alcohol reading of .10, which in police parlance indicated inebriation, represented one milligram of alcohol per decimeter of blood on the hospital's differently calibrated scale—virtually none at all.

Jeanne's ghost became a tangible presence for us. We interviewed her parents, her two sisters, coworkers, friends and the man, it turned out, with whom she'd been having an affair. The picture that emerged was one of a desperately unhappy woman who wanted out of her marriage—but was afraid he would kill her if she threatened to leave.

She had told her therapist that her marriage had not worked from the beginning. Fred was mean, morose, with the feeling that the normal rules of behavior didn't apply to him, and their sex life was a disaster—and in July 1976, she told the psychologist she was ready to call it quits. Two days later, Fred showed up with her for counseling and, in a detailed written account, admitted beating Jeanne on at least one occasion. But he would never, he said, consider divorce, which only made attorneys rich. If things continued to go badly, he said he would simply disappear and never see his wife or kids again.

On October 8, 1976, Jeanne wrote to her sister Carol: "He had tears in his eyes, but the whole thing is progressing fantastically. He is terrifically understanding. Just knew it anyway but wouldn't admit it to himself. He's moving out to our house in Oxnard November 10th. We're filing for divorce at that time..."

On October 15, Jeanne returned home to Malibu from an exhausting Chicago turnaround flight. The house was quiet because Heidi, their eldest child, was in the hospital that night having her tonsils removed.

The night was balmy and windless. Rudy Veland, an architect who lived next door to Fred and Jeanne, had just settled into a deep sleep when he was awakened abruptly at around 10:45 by shouts. "Rudy, Rudy, help!" called the voice from next door. "Get Dr. Morgenstern. Jeanne's hurt."

Dr. Leon Morgenstern, the director of surgery at Cedars-Sinai, lived just across the street and arrived with Veland within minutes. They found Fred naked, crouched by the swimming pool, administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to an equally naked, soaking wet and apparently lifeless Jeanne. By the time the paramedics arrived, Morgenstern had deciphered a faint pulse.

A distraught Fred told investigators that Jeanne had made a

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phone call, then poured herself a glass of wine and joined him in the hot tub. Later, he went into the house at her request to refill her wine glass, heard the baby crying and went to change her. When he came out again, he found Jeanne floating face down in the pool.

She was taken to Westlake Hospital, where she lay in a coma for a week before life-support systems were turned off.

**W**e were now visiting Fred regularly in Folsom Prison near Sacramento, where he had begun serving his sentence, spending five and six hours at a stretch taping our interviews with him. While he'd previously denied that Jeanne was going to divorce him, when we confronted him with what we had learned about their marriage, he admitted it was true.

Likewise, Fred and his family had always insisted that an inquest had determined that Jeanne had died from an aneurysm. We had found that there had been no such inquest, and, in fact, an aneurysm had been specifically ruled out by a routine autopsy.

An aneurysm, Fred patiently explained to us, was just one of several possibilities Jeanne's doctors had suggested as to why a strong swimmer would suddenly drown in her own backyard pool. His family had simply felt "aneurysm" was a convenient explanation, one people would understand.

Meanwhile, as we continued digging into his life, we found a list of insurance claims that would have made an underwriter blanch. A car burned, then a houseboat and then the house of a neighbor in Malibu who had been interfering with some of Fred's construction plans for his own beach house. That fire was followed by an offer from Fred to buy the man's house at a ridiculously low price, according to his widow. Disasters just seemed to follow in Fred Roehler's wake. And when they did, he benefited to the tune of large amounts of money, which invariably fueled the next step in his gradually escalating lifestyle.

The more time we spent with him, the uneasier we became. It became harder to ignore the growing list of contradictions in his story. He had sworn in court that he had had no problems with Doug. But when we challenged him on one visit with snippets of a tape recording we had uncovered that had been made on a boat outing, in which we found his tone toward the boy surprisingly harsh, he became nervous and admitted, "Well, it was no secret that Doug and I clashed." In fact, he had done his best to keep it just that.

The story of whose idea it had been not to register their marriage kept changing. First, it had been Fred's personal lawyer Fairfield's idea. Later, it was Fred's idea and still later, Verna's. Taking out \$60,000 life-insurance policies on each of the children elicited similar ever-changing stories. In fact, he insisted, the whole motive was ridiculous—the result of a mistake by the insurance company. The family trust—not Fred—was to have been the beneficiary of Verna's insurance, he claimed. But we had uncovered notes in Fred's own handwriting, in which he clearly wrote that he



and Verna were to be the beneficiaries of each other's policies.

Even more upsetting, when we told him about our visits to his children, his beleaguered brother—his health seriously threatened as a result of the strain of the trial—and his old friends, he never ventured a single inquiry about how they were or what they were doing. The frantic father who during the trial was so desperately concerned about how his children were adjusting to the tragedy that had befallen them suddenly seemed to have no need to hear about their welfare. It was a very different Fred from the one we thought we knew.

In March 1985, we traveled to Centerville, carrying a stained-glass window Fred had made in Folsom for his mother.

We were armed with a

long list of friends and neighbors of the Roehlers, but few wanted to talk to us. Many were afraid we were private detectives hired by the parents to get their son out of prison. That was just the kind of thing they would do, we were told. For the fact was that countless "close friends" had no difficulty whatsoever in believing that Charlotte and Fritz Roehler's eldest son had committed murder. "If there was money in it," said one flatly, "he did it."

We interviewed more than 50 people in that small town. Many of them distrusted and feared the Roehlers. One evening, a longtime family friend who had known Fred since childhood casually mentioned the time Fritz Roehler's boat mysteriously exploded in flames. There had been a large insurance settlement—just as there had been when another boat had also burned and again when an old barn in Fritz's backyard had burned down. With the money, they built a spanking new barn with a cute little apartment over it. The Roehlers' youngest son, Scott, was getting married and, lo and behold, there was a nice place for the newlyweds to live.

We could feel the hair stand up on the backs of our necks as we learned how the Roehlers slowly turned themselves into an advertisement for the Perfect Family—and how easily Fred bought into the myth, somehow managing to elevate himself psychologically above his classmates. He was richer, cleverer, more handsome, more successful, even when they had evidence to the contrary.

We met women who had dated him in high school and college who hanker after him to this day. He was the dark, romantic demon lover that they had never forgotten, though decades, marriage and children had intervened.

From one of them, Liz, we heard a strange, sinister story. There had always been a lot of tension in their relationship, Liz

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explained, sexual and otherwise, because despite her infatuation with him, like his other girlfriends, she said he was a less than satisfactory lover. And Liz began to have dreams, she said, in which Fred was stalking her. In one such dream, he was stabbing her with a knife.

"I told Fred about my dream," she said. "He got very excited. He took me into his room and set up his camera with the shutter on automatic, so that he could take a picture of us together."

In the photograph he staged with Liz, Fred is holding a dagger against her neck. His other hand is on his heart, as if he were in sorrow at losing his love. Liz is pointing a matching dagger at his chest. The photograph is chilling, a fantasy of murder.

The more we uncovered, the more we worried about writing a book that would—of necessity, judging by what we were finding out—cause even more pain to the three remaining Roehler-Johnson children. Uncomfortable with the idea of making money out of their misfortune, we approached their guardians, Ron and Elizabeth Roehler, and suggested that we give 50 percent of all royalties to the children's trust. We didn't know it then, but that offer would be the cause of untold frustration and pain and, in the end, would sabotage the book.

Back at Folsom, Fred took the news about our strange reception in Centerville unemotionally. He denied any knowledge of his father's insurance claims, but then admitted that on one occasion he "might have" told his brother Ron, "The old man better be careful with his scams . . . one of these days he's going to get caught."

A few days after our last visit, we received a letter from Fred. He wanted to review all the transcripts of all the interviews from Centerville, with names attached. We refused. We told him those people had talked to us very reluctantly and only after guarantees of strict confidence. We offered to outline the charges people made to give him a chance to refute them, but we could not tell him who had said what.

Then came an ultimatum: Either we told him who said what, or he would cut off all communication with us. Two weeks later, he did. We never heard from him again, though shortly afterward, we got a letter from Bill Fairfield asking us to attend a meeting with Ron and Elizabeth Roehler, who wanted to make sure that our offer to split the royalties from the book with the children's trust still stood. We told them, of course, that it did.

Before our last meeting with Fred, we had sailed to see Bird Rock firsthand. We had expected a vast expanse of ocean, but the biggest surprise was how compact the anchorage was. From the corner of Bird Rock to the spot where the *Perseverance* anchored was about a five-minute row. Ivor, only a modest swimmer, had no difficulty undertaking the distance. For someone who was as strong in the water as Fred, the temptation to strike out for the yacht rather than the rock—even in that cold water and with two bodies in tow—



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should have been irresistible. To instead swim against the current to the base of the sheer face of the rock simply didn't make sense.

But it was on a second trip, when we examined more closely the place on the rock face where Fred told us he had stayed with Verna and Doug, that we *knew*. It was the sheerest point on the cliff—some 25 feet high. Nearby was a blowhole through which the tide gushed with a deafening roar. Even if Verna and Doug had been conscious, they would have had difficulty hearing each other, let alone expecting anyone else to hear their cries for help.

It was also frighteningly obvious that the spot, tucked into an indentation in the cliff, was probably the most shadowed on the entire rock face, a place where, even the keenest eye would have had difficulty spotting them. Only someone who wanted neither to be seen nor heard would have chosen to stay there.

Yet an easy swim around the bend—back toward the *Perseverance* and completely out in the open—was a shelf that provided relatively easy access to Bird Rock. The only time in all of our conversations with Fred at Folsom that he became really agitated was when we told him we had sailed twice to Santa Cruz and that Ivor had made that swim and—without great difficulty—actually climbed onto the rock.

We now strongly suspected that Bird Rock held the secret of how he had managed to handle two killings. Surely, either Verna or Doug would have fought like a maniac to save the other, creating a commotion and running the risk of being seen or heard. So Fred, we were practically certain, rowed to the rock, where he landed one of them and the dog, Lady. Then he returned to the other still in the boat. We don't know in what order he did the killing, but by separating the unsuspecting pair, Fred had made the job easier for himself.

The irony, we believe to this day, is that the incriminating "pattern of bruising" on Doug's head, which convicted Fred Roehler, was a figment of an overzealous coroner's imagination. There

hadn't been a mark on Jeanne Roehler—and we are convinced there wasn't a mark on Verna or Doug. A man of Fred's strength and ability in the water didn't have to hit them. All he had to do was hold them under water, one at a time, until the life left them.

**O**f our completed manuscript, Bantam's editorial director glowingly wrote: "You have written a fascinating book, and Bantam is going to do well with it and by it." But Fred, having exhausted the appeals process on his murder conviction, had acquired a new attorney, who out of the blue wrote asking that Fred be given the opportunity to review our manuscript to make sure it was "objective" and factual.

In the interim, in July 1987, Green Beret convicted murderer Dr. Jeffrey MacDonald had sued writer Joe McGinniss in a famed fraud and breach-of-contract suit for his book on MacDonald's murder of his wife and two daughters, *Fatal Vision*. MacDonald claimed that McGinniss had misled him into thinking he would write a book proving his innocence and instead had found him guilty. After a costly three-month trial and a hung jury in L.A., McGinniss settled with MacDonald.

Since no precedent had been set, Bantam lawyers now suggested that Fred might sue us on the same basis. Rich now—the insurance company, faced with the threat of bad-faith suits, had paid \$820,000 into the children's trust, and no one doubted that that money would be made available to Fred if he needed it—and with little to exercise his brain in prison, he would turn his energies to fighting us.

Our promise to split our royalties with the children's trust could be interpreted as a financial agreement with Fred, they insisted, even though it was entered into entirely of our own volition. We pointed out that when we entered into the agreement we had already had all the access we needed for the book.

Nevertheless, the Bantam legal eagles said, "In this country, no one would believe that anybody gives away money if they don't have to." And on that cynical note, our contract with them was terminated. And so, the completed Fred Roehler book—all 415 pages of it—sits on our shelf, a testament to the fact that, in some small measure at least, he had won.

For us, the story represents nearly a decade of work and enormous frustration, but it also represents the greatest lesson in life either of us have ever learned. There was a time when we didn't believe in absolute evil. Like good liberals, we believed evil was the result of adverse social conditions: *West Side Story*'s

"I'm depraved on account I'm deprived." We no longer feel that way.

Evil exists. We have met it face to face. ■

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and Ivor Davis.

**Roehler and the family dog aboard the *Perseverance*; a short while later, Roehler was rushed by the coast guard to the hospital after the dinghy carrying him and his wife and stepson capsized.**

